



BLAC RECLAMATION: 2025 STORYTELLING & POLICY SUMMIT REPORT



A GATHERING OF HEARTS, HISTORIES, AND HOPE

The BLAC Reclamation Policy Summit was more than a meeting; it was a living testimony of what happens when our people come together with honesty, courage, and love for our communities. For three days, voices from across Appalachia and beyond met in one room. Mothers and fathers, elders and youth, faith leaders and healers, educators and organizers, artists and advocates, all carrying their own histories, their own visions, and their own truth. Together, we spoke across differences in geography, experience, and perspective. And in every story, we recognized the same thread: our survival and our vision are bound together.

We heard you speak of the harms: Coal and steel mills still poisoning our air. Neighborhoods living under the weight of environmental racism and redlining. Grocery stores and health care stripped away from our blocks. Schools underfunded, housing unstable, and trauma passed down through generations.

We heard you name the gaps, the missing resources, the policies that fail us, and the systems that push us out of our own neighborhoods. **But we also heard the hope:** the call for healing spaces, the hunger for leadership development, the determination to tell our own stories in our own voices, and the vision of communities where our children thrive.



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From Harm to Healing: What We Face and What We Envision

You named core issues such as coal and steel mill pollution, both active and legacy; environmental racism and zoning policies that harm Black and brown communities; Black women's health, especially reproductive care and maternal wellness; blight, housing insecurity, and inequitable zoning practices; food deserts and the loss of local grocery stores; addiction, gun violence, and lack of mental health support; language barriers and disrespect for cultural identity; inadequate healthcare access, including maternal and mental health services; limited inclusive housing and resources; and underfunded schools alongside a lack of civic education opportunities.

You also painted a picture of communities rooted in care, wellness, and mutual support; with access to grocery stores, healthcare, safe housing, and green spaces; led by trained, resourced community leaders; telling their own stories with dignity and ancestral truth; and bringing policymakers into real listening sessions where community shape decisions.



We aren't waiting for someone to come save us. We're building what we need right now, together.

We are not waiting for someone else to write our story, we are building it ourselves.

That means training leaders through train-the-trainer programs, so knowledge multiplies; creating story circles and community journalism programs to document our wins and struggles; providing doula training and maternal health leadership development for Black women and families; engaging father leaders to strengthen family and community wellness; and expanding civic education so every resident knows their power and how to use it.

WE HEARD YOU, WE'RE WITH YOU

The Summit didn't end when we left the room. You are still in this work, and so are we. The BLAC Reclamation Policy Summit was more than a spark. You brought the fire. You brought your brilliance, your grief, your strategies, and your stories. You brought the stubborn, beautiful love you carry for your communities, and that love lit the path forward.

You told us what you need: hubs, circles, and networks that don't extract but honor your leadership. Spaces that don't just talk about healing but make healing possible. You asked for places to grow, to breathe, to be seen, and to lead and we listened.

So now, we build. We build hubs that become networks. We build leaders who multiply leaders. We build sacred spaces that outlast every policy designed to erase us. We build systems that care for us and remember us. **And most of all, we build our future story, in our own voices, with our own hands, rooted in a love.** We move from trauma to testimony. From burnout to breath. From survival to soul-deep restoration. And this is just the beginning.

We invite you to join us for the next Storytelling & Policy Summit, from BLAC Reclamation to BLAC Revival in Charleston, West Virginia.

The BLAC Revival will be an intergenerational, cultural, and spiritual homecoming. It won't be just a conference--it will be a sacred space where generations gather, strategy meets song, justice meets joy, and where we revive what's been buried by systems that were never meant for us.

Let's write the next chapter, together.



JOIN THE BLAC MOVEMENT: BE PART OF THE FUTURE STORY

The Summit reminded us of something powerful: the future story of our communities cannot be written by a few, it must be built together. From the hollers of Appalachia to the neighborhoods of Pittsburgh and beyond, there is a place for you in this movement. BLAC is more than an organization, it is a living network of people committed to justice, healing, and building thriving communities. Sign up to join BLAC today!

Visit bit.ly/JoinBLACMovement, to sign up!

- **Share your story.** Be a guest on the [Re-Membering Podcast](#) and contribute to the living record of our people. Every story strengthens the movement, preserving history and inspiring change.
- **Join a BLAC Storytelling Circle.** These circles honor the Appalachian tradition of truth-telling, helping participants connect personal experiences to collective transformation. Your voice fuels the work of justice and community healing.
- **Support our work.** Become a BLAC donor. Every dollar, even one, moves us closer to our goals—funding community programs, advocacy campaigns, and leadership development. Your support matters.
- **Lead in your community.** Host a Community Table Talk. Learn and engage in community journalism. Train-the-trainer. Civic Engagement training.

The Summit was a reminder that our work is shared work, and that everyone has a role to play. By stepping forward, you help strengthen the network, deepen our impact, and ensure that the next chapter of Appalachian history is written by and for the people. Join BLAC, and help us build a future where our communities are empowered, our voices are heard, and our people thrive. Together, we are writing a story that is bold and just.

Join the BLAC Movement: bit.ly/JoinBLACMovement